

# The Hospitality Consulting Playbook

## Choosing the Right 'Head Coach



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There is an old adage: Those who cannot play, coach.

Does it really take more skill to play than to coach? In terms of a measurement of talent, which is best?

My answer? Both!

The last two winning Super Bowl coaches were college football players but did not play professionally. While it may seem counterintuitive, that is not unique among either professional or college coaches. In fact, it is true that most professional sports coaches never played professionally.

The qualities unique to successful coaches are a focus on excellence, a long resume of broad experience, and the ability to translate both to a wide variety of situations and groups of people.

The same is true of consultants. In today's challenging environment, consultants are brought in to solve problems, elevate performance, partner on the redirection of an organization, and leverage past experience to achieve what could not have been achieved before. A consultant has to lead the organization to conclusions through consensus rather than just telling people what to do.

Let's face it, like head coaches who win big games, the good hospitality consultants are highly sought-after, and the bad ones give the profession a bad name. Consider this playbook for selecting your consultant, AKA your "head coach."

## Play #1: Define Your Success

You get what you pay for. Your determination of the value of the work to be done is the key, and the fact that you are searching means there is an immediate need. While a consultant allows for interim support with no permanent increase in overhead, there is a capital investment that requires return.

A consultant must provide that immediate expertise and impact. Defining what success looks like is essential to validate your desired outcome before you hire. What does the success of your project look like to you?

- What are the actual needs and gaps?
- Do I need a fresh set of eyes to evaluate the business?
- Do I need a sounding board to talk through various scenarios and play them out?
- Do I want truth and facts?
- Is there a need for all of the above?

Successful consultants have no agenda and will adapt in tandem with your business needs.

## Play #2: Value Experience

Nothing can replace experience. Experience equates to credibility, which in turn results in buy-in from stakeholders. When evaluating credentials, ask these questions:

First, how long have they been consulting? It's not unusual for a job hunter to hang out a consulting shingle in between corporate roles. You want to work with someone who is in this for the long haul.

Second, what is the relevancy of their experience to the need? A hotel consultant who specializes in housekeeping efficiency will not be a fit for creating a new restaurant concept.

How current is their knowledge? One of the greatest values an outsider can bring to your business is fresh perspective, and this should always be underscored by familiarity with trends and emerging technology. The consultant doesn't have to be an expert on every single latest and greatest gadget but well-versed enough to guide you.



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Finally, what are the consultant's past successes? While project details are often confidential, a consultant should be able to describe past projects and give you a general sense of positive results.

Another consideration is knowing where their expertise ends, and another's begins. Understand your limitations and surround yourselves with complementary expertise.

### **Play #3: The Power of Chemistry**

The importance of chemistry cannot be overstated, particularly if a project has a short timeline. The ability to articulate goals, objectives and agreed-upon metrics upfront is critical to producing successful outcomes. A good consultant needs to immediately blend with your team to activate the types of results required. This, like great coaching, is a skill learned over time. The ability to share values, to establish rapport, to adapt and to understand an audience is rooted in the ability to listen. It is all about trust, and that is built on clear communication and results.

A good consultant, like a head coach, is part of the organization; can work within that organization; delivers against the goal and objectives that have been laid out; and can engage your team in the process.

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